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Ministry of Advanced Education

$2.4M HELPS SUPPORT ABORIGINAL STUDENTS ON 6 CAMPUSES

VICTORIA – Six public post-secondary institutions are receiving $2.4 million from the Province for gathering places that will support the growing number of Aboriginal students on campus and reflect their unique cultures, Advanced Education Minister Murray Coell said today.

"We've committed $15 million to help all of our institutions either create gathering places or enhance the ones they have, which will encourage more Aboriginal people to enrol in post-secondary education, and help them succeed when they do," Coell said. "These welcoming areas reflect Aboriginal traditions, give students offices and lounges to meet with mentors and each other – and show them they belong on the campuses of our colleges, universities, university-colleges and institutes."

The funding, part of the $65-million Aboriginal post-secondary education strategy announced by Premier Gordon Campbell last year, provides up to $600,000 to each of B.C.'s public post-secondary institutions for gathering spaces. The first round of funding includes Northern Lights College, Kwantlen University College, the College of the Rockies, Langara College, the College of New Caledonia and Okanagan College.

"We are breaking down the barriers that have prevented so many of our Aboriginal people from being all they can be," Coell said. "At the same time, we're helping our province meet skills shortages by making sure the growing number of young Aboriginal people in B.C. have the knowledge and skills to build great careers."

More than 17,200 First Nation, Métis and Inuit students attended B.C.'s public post-secondary institutions in 2007, an increase of more than 16 per cent since 2002. However, according to B.C. Statistics, a non-Aboriginal is five times as likely to have a university degree as an Aboriginal person living on reserve, and almost three times more likely than an Aboriginal person off reserve.

Improving quality and choice in education is a key pillar of the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda. The gathering places funding also supports B.C.'s commitments through the Transformative Change Accord and the Métis Nation Relationship Accord to close the gaps by 2015 in education, health, housing, and economic opportunities that separate Aboriginal British Columbians from other citizens.

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1 backgrounder(s) attached.

Media contact: Gordon Williams
Communications Director
250 952-6508
250 413-7316 (cell)

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